**The Collection**

The Buxton family seems to have had, throughout most of its history, a strong propensity to collect every document relating to its estates, personal and official affairs, preserving not only important documents such as deeds and estate records, but even quite trivial items such as invitations, memoranda or scraps of writings which had come to it or passed through its hands. The principal interest of the collection lies in the light it sheds, across many centuries, on local East Anglian society and on the interaction of the county of Norfolk with national affairs. The range of the material is considerable, opening up a wide range of potential research avenues.

1. Deeds and charters

There are some 1200 deeds and charters, half of which date from c. 1160 to 1500. Many of the earlier deeds relate to lands in Tibenham, Bunwell, Thetford Priory and Earsham, but the vast majority concern lands in Rushford and Shadwell and are relevant to the foundation of Rushford College in 1342 and its subsequent history. This collection of deeds is complemented by numerous abstracts of title compiled mainly during the sixteenth century.

2. Estate records

As might be expected, the records for Buxton properties in Tibenham and Rushford/Shadwell are the most extensive. There are remarkably complete runs of court rolls and court books between 1327 and 1692 for the manors in Bunwell, Carleton Rode and Tibenham, including Channons. Strangely, though, there is only one court roll from Rushford (1453-62). The great mass of copies of court rolls, court extracts, bailiffs' accounts, rentals, extents, terriers, abbuttals, surveys, farm books and related material, extend from the fourteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century, providing a comprehensive source for local and social historians, as well as for the history of land ownership and land management in Norfolk over a period of some 600 years. A score of other manors such as Aslacton, Banham, Earsham, Forncett, Moulton and Wilby are also represented, if less comprehensively.

3. Personal and domestic papers

Most generations of the Buxton family have left account books of personal and domestic expenses, revealing details of their lifestyles, interests and cultural tastes. Worthy of particular mention are the accounts of two different John Buxtons (for 1627-31/1653-4 and 1737-65 respectively), and a fairly complete run of housekeeping accounts for Shadwell between 1725 and 1823. Other interesting material includes accounts of school and college expenses (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries); journals and diaries recording travels by Buxtons in England or on the Continent, for example the diary of John Buxton who died at Orléans in 1682, part of young Elizabeth Cholmeley's 'Journal of a season in town' (1825) or the descriptions of yacht cruises in the Mediterranean and the English Channel (1852-5); an early manuscript booklet (1588) and several loose papers (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) containing recipes for medical, veterinary and horticultural treatments; a report of a séance (1866); and school exercises and notes compiled in the pursuit of university studies (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries).

4. Papers relating to county administration and politics

The Buxtons' involvement in the political, administrative, legal and military affairs of their county is witnessed by numerous documents, relating to the office of High Sheriff, the collection of ship money, tax assessments for the raising of arms and troops, musters for the Navy or the Norfolk militia, prison accounts, initiatives against poaching, and election campaigns. There also remain interesting collections of papers dealing with criminal cases (magistrates' business) from times when Buxtons acted as Justices of the Peace (mainly late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).

5. Correspondence

Over 3000 letters (1519-1926) are preserved among the Buxton Papers. Most of these are of a private nature, conveying personal messages or dealing with every-day concerns, family affairs, estate matters, illnesses, life at school or university, books, the planting of trees, communicating or commenting on local, national or international affairs. Such letters afford intriguing glimpses into the private lives of the writers, their lifestyles, their concerns and expectations. Some letters deserve special mention here, for example, Robert Buxton's correspondence with the Howards, in particular with the Earl of Arundel (1577-83). From the same period (1571) there is a letter in Latin, possibly the only extant writing of Ralph Crocket, a recusant executed in 1588. From the middle of the next century there are some amusing letters of Thomas Knyvett to his friend John Buxton. Between 1767 and 1770 George Brisac, lieutenant in the Royal Navy, writes from HMS *Romsey* off the North American coast, describing his experience of life in the Navy; thirty years later, now a captain and former commander of HMS *Iris*, he deplores his, naturally wholly undeserved, court martial. From the same period, some letters of Leonard Buxton contain polemical outbursts against the monarchy while expressing his sympathies with the independence movement in North America. The very extensive political correspondence of Robert John Buxton in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries sheds much light on the political events and opinions in the county. Of special interest in the nineteenth century is a collection of love letters (1854-63) exchanged between Lady Elizabeth Buxton, then in her fifties, and the octogenarian bishop of Ely, Thomas Turton, while Lord Wolseley and Walter Spencer Stanhope of the 15th Hussars, a Buxton relative, write from the Nile expedition of 1884-5.

6.Architectural drawings and sketches

These drawings, executed by John Buxton (1685-1731), are mainly of Shadwell Lodge and the stables at Channons.

7. Wills and probates

There are c. 100 wills and probates of the Buxtons and related families.

8. Papers of related families

The collection contains many papers originating from families into which the Buxtons married. Of some interest is the personal notebook of Richard Wilton of Topcroft Hall, a Buxton son-in-law, recording in great detail the minutiae of a country squire's life between 1580 and 1630. Weekly bills for domestic expenses, travel costs, the financial burdens of providing a university education for Wilton's sons, as well as notes on members of the Wilton family, may all be found here. From the Pert and Conyers families in Essex there are numerous papers relating to their estates in Broadholme, Nottinghamshire, and Saxilby and Hardwick in Lincolnshire (1536-1649). The Gooch family and their estates at Earsham are likewise well documented during the seventeenth century. Of particular interest here are the detailed business accounts of Leonard Holme, a merchant, ship outfitter and victualler of Great Yarmouth; his accounts (1639-41) were continued by his son-in-law and his family until 1680. Another family related to the Buxtons were the Hernes of Tibenham and Earsham. A substantial quantity of letters and personal papers, including sermons, notes from university studies, college bills and associated material have found their way into the Buxton archive. Of this family, two members may be singled out: the Revd John Herne (c. 1655-1707), D.D., Canon of Windsor and Rector of East Woodhay, and his brother Nicholas (c. 1656-1718), a businessman and sometime consul at Alicante, who left a book of housekeeping expenses (in Spanish) as well as many letters communicating news of political developments and military campaigns on the Continent towards the end of the seventeenth century.

Finally, there is a substantial collection of manorial and estate papers, originally belonging to the Hare family of Hargham. Their connection with the Buxtons is a remote one: In the middle of the seventeenth century Ralph Hare acquired the manor of Wilby from the Wilton family, and in the late eighteenth century Thomas Beevor, brother of Juliana Mary Buxton, married Anne, daughter and heir of Hugh Hare of Hargham, but neither of these facts explain the presence of these papers among the Buxton Papers. The Hare family owned substantial estates in Shropham hundred as well as in and around Fordham and Soham, Cambridgeshire. The papers are mainly of local interest, containing some court rolls and court books (Hargham, fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, Shropham hundred and Wilby, sixteenth century), and very extensive estate papers: leet court books of Shropham hundred, covering most of the sixteenth century, and complete records of the leet court verdicts of several manors in the said hundred between 1678 and 1749 (Attleborough, Baconsthorpe in Attleborough, Besthorpe, Hargham, Illington, Larling, Rockland, Roudham, Shropham and Wilby). Attention may also be drawn to a survey (1629) of Hargham Manor, updated in 1681 and accompanied by a very detailed map book of the town and manor of Hargham.

**Arrangement of the collection**

The collection was 'roughly sorted into 93 boxes' in 1903, further material being added between 1908 and 1926, and in 1966. Although the papers were to some extent grouped either chronologically, thematically or by type of document, more than half the collection was in fact boxed without discernible order or purpose. The size of the collection made it impossible to arrange the material in a more systematic way - this would have required taking the whole collection apart and, in many cases, separating papers from their original context. However, it was decided to group the correspondence and early deeds and charters separately from the rest of the collection. This decision has resulted in three different catalogues: a 'Calendar of Buxton Letters', a 'Calendar of Buxton Deeds (to 1517)' and a 'Catalogue of Buxton Papers'. The last of these lists the remaining, and largest, part of the collection, which was essentially left in the original boxes.

Whereas the letters and early deeds are catalogued individually, the main body of the Buxton Papers has been catalogued by summary description of box contents. To make this part of the collection more accessible, the material in each box has been grouped and described according to document type:

1. deeds and related documents, including family and marriage settlements, bonds, discharges, copies, extracts and memoranda of deeds, title abstracts - arranged by place or family;

2. wills and probates, including papers relating to the administration of wills;

3. manorial papers (in the narrowest sense): court rolls and court books - arranged by manor;

4. estate papers (in the broadest sense): estate bills, receipts and accounts, rentals, bailiffs' accounts, extents, terriers and surveys, farm books, tax receipts, copies of court roll and court extracts - arranged by manor or estate;

5. personal and domestic papers: personal accounts, bills and receipts, housekeeping accounts, diaries, journals, notebooks, sermons, recipes for medical cures etc.;

6. case papers: concerning disputes over title to property and criminal cases (magistrates' business);

7. county matters: appointments to county offices, election canvassing and expenses, prison accounts, papers relating to the Norfolk militia, musters, ship money accounts etc.;

8. ecclesiastical papers: papers relating to patronage, presentations and admissions to vacant livings, endowments, glebe lands, church repairs etc.;

9. papers relating to the maintenance of public highways, rivers and bridges;

10. architectural drawings

11. maps

12. printed matter

The calendars of Buxton deeds and Buxton letters each have their own index. The index to the 'Catalogue of Buxton Papers' lists personal names, family names with date ranges and place names with date ranges, enabling the user to target specific papers from chosen periods.